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PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN: HUMAN RIGHTS AND YOUTH

Written statement submitted by International Educational Development, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[23 August 1993]

Protection of the human rights of children

1. Children require special protection to ensure their development and education in conditions of peace and security. War, however, is a serious disrupter of the lives of children, and necessitates even more rigorous protections so that the rights, especially the right to life, of children are respected.

2. Many States are signatories and parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrating the widespread commitment to children's rights. The Convention contains strong provisions to protect children in times of armed conflict. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, recognizing the

horrific conditions of children worldwide due to armed conflicts, has paid welcome attention to children in such situations. In fact, at its second session the Committee decided to hold its first general discussion on this topic (see CDC/C/10). The Committee continued its discussion on children in armed conflict at its third session and issued recommendations on protecting children from the adverse consequences of armed conflict (see CDC/C/18).

3. The Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1993/83, took note of the initiative of the Committee, noted the high casualty rate of civilians and children and drew attention to the specific dangers of anti-personnel mines.

4. The work of International Educational Development and our Humanitarian Law Project leads us to conclude that the focus of attention by the Committee is justified and should continue. We would like to present a few examples of the effects of armed conflicts on children's lives with a view to encouraging the Sub-Commission, the Commission and the Committee to take concrete action within their respective mandates.

5. In Croatia, as of 25 June 1993, 97 children had been killed, 459 children wounded, and 4,000 children became war orphans. Of the 130,000 Croatian citizens still missing and presumed dead, many are children. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the more than 200,000 war dead, approximately 20,000 are children. Most of these children were from Sarajevo. There are apparently no reliable statistics on the numbers of wounded children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but these numbers are surely high as well. What is apparent is that, as in all wars, the injuries are highly likely to cause life-long disabilities.

6. In the Israeli-occupied territory of Gaza, a total of 232 Palestinian minors were killed by Israeli troops between 9 December 1987 and 8 June 1993, including 41 Palestinians under the age of 16, in the first seven months of this year alone. This represents a significant increase in the deaths of Palestinian minors shot with live ammunition by Israeli soldiers, as in 1992 a total of 17 Palestinian minors were killed. These incidents are too often the result of soldiers overreacting to rock-throwing or name-calling. Very few of these shootings have occurred in situations where the soldiers' lives were actually at stake, although this is the commonly given explanation for such actions.

7. In Iraq, war-related casualties among children have had a profound impact. In the Gulf war, the policy of the allied forces led by the United States of America included what has been called "militarily needless slaughter" (see 1993 Medical and Health Annual, Encyclopaedia Britannica, p. 24). Air attacks in the first two weeks of the war alone were later estimated to have caused 2,500 to 5,000 civilian deaths; the second phase targeted civilian infrastructure. The Gulf war resulted in large numbers of refugees: of the over 2.9 million immigrant workers and Iraqi citizens who fled the region, more than 1.1 million were women and children. All suffered from exposure to harsh weather, inadequate supplies of clean water and food, and a lack of shelter and health services. The infant mortality rate among the refugees climbed to nearly 1,000 babies dead per day in April of 1991.

8. Children in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia are injured by shelling and anti-personnel mines. Serbian soldiers also target schools, playgrounds and hospitals. In Vrlika, Croatia, the hospital for mentally retarded children was shelled in 1991 and 100 children had to be evacuated to inadequate residences. Several died during transport.

9. Children in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina also suffer from psychological traumas. (Some sources indicate all children in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are affected.) Psychologists say shock is especially great and serious when a child faces aggression among once closely related persons, neighbours, friends. And such injuries are transmitted to the next generation.

10. The Gulf war also left psychological scars on the minds of Iraqi children. Two thirds of children interviewed believed they would not live to become adults, three fourths said they felt sad or unhappy, 20 per cent said they feared losing their family and two thirds could neither sleep nor concentrate properly. Street children and child beggars are common sights on Iraqi streets. Thousands of Iraqi children are displaced.

11. In the Sudan, claims that boys as young as 8 years old have died fighting for rebel forces, who use the boys as "human shields", are widely believed. It is reportedly common knowledge that 17- and 18-year-old boys are actively recruited by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, and it is assumed that younger boys have also been recruited by rebel forces. These boys are on their own. Their fathers have been killed by either troops or hunger, their mothers and sisters have been left behind to watch what is left of the herds (and often end up begging in the streets of what is left of the Sudan's cities). Hundreds of boys are refugees in camps in Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as on the borders of the Sudan. Many of them have relatives in the camps, but resist being drawn back into the discipline of a family after having been on their own for so long a time. These are the Sudan's "lost boys".

12. In conformity with obligations of both international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States must take all possible measures to ensure special protection and suitable care and the physical and psychological recovery, as well as the social reintegration of children affected by an armed conflict.